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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000429

SIPDIS

USTR FOR BETSY STILLMAN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ETRD](#) [BG](#) [BG](#) [BGD](#)

SUBJECT: SCA A/S ROCCA MEETS WITH MFA OFFICIALS

Classified By: CDA Judith Chammas, reason 1.4(d)

1. (C) Summary and Introduction: SCA A/S Christina Rocca discussed concerns over the rise in extremism and terrorist acts, upcoming elections, and governance issues. MFA officials assured her that BDG is committed to addressing these issues and has made significant progress in combating terrorism. A/S Rocca offered training and assistance in capacity building to combat terrorism. MFA officials welcomed the offer and asked for support on the Trade Bill pending in Congress to give Bangladesh and other developing countries duty-free access to the U.S. garment market. End Summary.

2. (U) A/S Rocca held separate meetings on January 26 with Foreign Minister Morshed Khan, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, and Foreign Affairs Advisor Reaz Rahman. CDA and EconOff (notetaker) accompanied. Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States Shamsher Chowdhury was also present.

Rise in Extremism and Terrorist Acts

3. (C) MFA officials acknowledged concern over the rise in terrorism in Bangladesh but assured A/S Rocca that the BDG has made significant strides in combating terrorism. Foreign Affairs Advisor Rahman said that the BDG has taken aggressive steps to destroy terrorist cells and confiscate illegal arms and ammunition. Many leaders and operatives have been arrested and some have even been charged and are in the process of being prosecuted, he said. The BDG has attacked several JMB and JMJB cells and even came close to capturing JMB leader Sheikh Abdur Rahman. Ambassador Chowdhury asserted that BDG's efforts are remarkable given the BDG's limited capacity in expertise and resources. A/S Rocca commended the BDG on the progress made in several cases so far but reiterated the need for thorough, timely, and productive investigations, and culprits at all levels must be punished, regardless of any political implications. A/S Rocca offered USG cooperation in training and assistance programs to improve capacity in law enforcement and counter-terrorism activities.

4. (C) MFA officials pointed to new counter-terrorism draft legislation as a big step towards combating terrorism. Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin said that the new counter-terrorism law will be enacted, and that it will contain strict anti-money laundering and terrorism financing provisions. He added that the PM refused to allow provisions in the law for clemency or amnesty for terrorists. MFA officials said that recent acts have incited anger but not fear among the people, which is a sign that they are confident in the government's ability to combat terrorism. They welcomed USG cooperation in training and capacity building.

Elections

5. (C) A/S Rocca said that Bangladesh serves as an example of a vibrant, moderate Muslim democracy with three successful elections behind it, and expressed USG desire to see this tradition continued through the next national election, stating that the USG expects a level playing field and that the deck would not be stacked in favor of any party. MFA officials reiterated the BDG's commitment to the democratic process and said that Bangladeshis valued their democratic rights dearly. Reaz Rahman said that the opposition is concerned about their ability to win national elections so they are determined to challenge the democratic system that has been effectively used in previous successful elections. Citing disputes over voters, Rahman said that the Awami League is opposed to a new voter list, even after NDI reported that more than 6.4 million names on the last list were fraudulent. MFA officials are confident that despite AL protests, the next national elections will happen as scheduled.

Governance

6. (C) MFA officials cited the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and reforms in the Public Service Commission as examples of steps taken by the administration to address

governance and corruption issues. Reaz Rahman said that combating corruption is a difficult challenge in a country with more than 140 million people, but that the many delays in introducing rules and procedures at the ACC, in separating the judiciary from the executive, and other such cases were not politically motivated but were due to practical constraints. Corruption is so rampant that many positive BDG reforms have not been very visible, he said. A/S Rocca pointed out the need for strong political will to tackle governance issues.

Trade Bill

17. (C) MFA officials said that a decline in Bangladeshi garment exports would have a devastating impact on the socio-economic condition of millions of women. They asked for the administration to support the Trade bill pending in Congress to give Bangladesh and other developing countries duty-free access to the U.S. garment market. Ambassador Chowdhury interjected that he had recently told Assistant USTR Karan Bhatia that Bangladesh would not oppose a consensus in the Hong Kong meetings and that USTR assured him that the Hong Kong meetings do not rule out a Trade bill. A/S Rocca said that she could not give them any hope about the bill given the sensitivity to the textile issue in the United States.

18. (U) A/S Rocca has cleared this message.
CHAMMAS